DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 253 958 EA 017 539

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TITLE Work-Based Attendance: A New Approach to Expanding Parental Choice in Education.
INSTITUTION MPR Associates, Berkeley, CA.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Aug 83
CONTRACT NIE-P-83-0045
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attendance; Elementary Secondary Education; Enrollment; Government School Relationship; Parent School Relationship; *Proximity; *Rezoning; School Business Relationship; School Choice; School Community Relationship; School Desegregation; *School District Reorganization; *School Location; *School Zoning; Transfer Policy
IDENTIFIERS *Work Based Attendance (School Choice)

ABSTRACT

This paper proposes a radical alternative to the current system of residence-based attendance: permit parents to send their children to schools near their workplaces, as a supplement to existing arrangements. This approach not only expands parental choice in education, but also helps to overcome other limitations inherent in residence-based school attendance. The first of the paper's three sections makes the following four points: (1) work-based attendance is responsive to significant changes in the structure of American family life; (2) it offers a new approach to achieving school integration; (3) it offers the potential for strengthening the connections between school and work; and (4) it responds to pressures for greater parental control over where children attend school. The second section discusses some of the major issues that would arise in developing work-based attendance plans: criteria for eligibility, legal issues, fiscal issues, child care, transportation, and employer involvement. The third section addresses the feasibility of such a plan and the potential role of the federal government in underwriting development costs, eliminating spending disparities, and sponsoring further research and evaluation. References are included. (TE)

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ED253958

WORK-BASED ATTENDANCE: A NEW APPROACH TO EXPANDING PARENTAL CHOICE IN EDUCATION

by

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August 1983

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EA 017 539

The work upon which this paper is based was performed pursuant to Contract No. NIE-P-83-0045 of the National Institute of Education. It does not, however, necessarily reflect the views of that agency.

Historically, American elementary and secondary education has been organized around where people live. To attend a particular school, a family has usually had to reside in a specific neighborhood attendance area. Throughout most of the nation's history, this approach to school attendance has made sense. Neighborhoods have constituted one of the major organizing blocks for social life, especially for mothers and children, and there has been no apparent reason for schools not to conform to this.

There are now, however, a number of important reasons to challenge the desirability of organizing schooling solely around residential location. First, the central assumption of such a system for organizing school attendance -- that the neighborhood is the focus for family life -- no longer holds for a growing number of American families. Well over half of all married women with school age children now work outside the home, and many family social networks are shaped by forces that are not neighborhood specific, such as leisure activities, intellectual or cultural pursuits, and perhaps most important, the workplace[1]. Second, maintaining neighborhood attendance patterns increasingly conflicts with efforts to achieve racial and social integration in public schools. The residential areas of most metropolitan regions continue to grow more homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, but the main approach to overcoming such isolation, school busing, has become less and less acceptable to majority and minority alike.[2] Third, residence-based attendance keeps school and work separated even though increasing numbers of teenagers are working and going to school at the same time. Fourth, residence-based attendance provides most parents with no choice among public schools at a time when dissatisfaction with public schools is high, many are opting out of the public school system, and pressure for expanded choice is growing.

This paper proposes a radical alternative to the current system of residence-based attendance: permit parents to send their children to schools near their workplaces. Work-based attendance would supplement, not replace, existing arrangements. Children would still be able to go to school near their homes, but as an alternative could attend a school near either parent's workplace. Many families, then, could choose among as many as three public schools.

Work-based attendance is not being advocated for all families or all districts. Many families would find it impractical or unappealing. They would simply continue to attend their local schools. In some areas, work-based attendance might threaten a delicately balanced integration plan or pose some other problem. These districts would not have to adopt work-based attendance. However, for many families and for many areas, work-based attendance offers the exciting prospect of not only expanding parental choice in education, but also helping to overcome other limitations of organizing school attendance solely around residential location. The sections that follow develop this prospect more fully, describing how work-based attendance would work and assessing its feasibility.

THE CASE FOR WORK-BASED ATTENDANCE

Work-based attendance would offer at least four significant advantages:

1. Work-based attendance would respond to significant changes in the structure of American family life. During the past twenty years, major changes have occurred in labor force participation and family structure. Increasing numbers of married women, especially women with young children, have entered the labor force. In 1980, 62 percent of all married women with school age children worked outside the home, up from only 39 percent in 1960. There has also been a dramatic rise in the number of single parent families. Single parent, female headed families accounted for 18 percent of all families in 1980 (up from only 7 percent in 1960), and most of these women work[3]. As a result of these trends, by 1980 only 36 percent of all children still lived in the so-called traditional family consisting of a wage-earning father and a mother at home caring for the children[4].

As a result, finding adequate child care and finding time to attend to their children's needs are major problems for many parents. In fact, the conflict between work and family life is emerging as the central family policy issue for the 1980's[5]. To help families cope, a growing number of employers have begun to provide benefits such as flexible work schedules, shared jobs, paternity and maternity leaves, subsidized child care, and leave to stay home with sick children.

Schools, however, have yet to respond, even though they too have been affected by the changes in the structure of family life. As parents are increasingly absent from the neighborhood during the day, it has become harder for them to develop close ties to their children's schools -- to participate in

school events, to attend conferences when problems arise, and to arrive at school quickly in the event of illness or emergency. Not only are parents unhappy about losing contact with the schools, but the quality of education may be suffering too. Evaluations of the preschool Headstart program showed that programs had no lasting effects unless parents were actively participating in administration, planning and volunteer capacities[6]. Parental participation may be equally important at the elementary school level. At the very least, parental involvement in schools signals to children that school is an important part of family life; and parental interest has a positive influence on children's attitudes toward school.

A work-based attendance option would provide a way for schools to respond to changing family needs. With children attending school near where they work, parents could once again enjoy the advantages of being close to their children's schools, including participation in school activities and availability in case of emergency. To foster this, employers might even be persuaded to provide "school breaks" in lieu of coffee breaks, sick leave, vacation time or other benefits. Moreover, it is conceivable that under such an attendance system, more fathers, who traditionally have been less able than mothers to take an active role in school affairs, would become important participants.

2. Work-based attendance would offer a new approach to achieving integration in public schools. Integrated schools will be hard to achieve as long as residential neighborhoods remain segregated and school attendance is based on residence. Integration under these circumstances requires large scale shifting of students across neighborhoods (usually by busing), and parents have resisted this.

It is significant that the resistance has been to busing to achieve integration, not to integration, and not to busing per se. Survey research monitoring racial attitudes over the last several decades shows the American public becoming more accepting of the need for racially integrated schools (85 percent in 1976 versus 63 percent in 1963)[7]. Compulsory busing, on the other hand, has been strongly opposed. A 1975 poll of parents indicated 74 percent opposed to busing to achieve racial balance. It is not the traveling that parents opposed, because at that time 52 percent of public school children rode the bus to school, and 7 out of 8 parents were satisfied with their busing[8].

Does this contradiction result because people are racist in practice no matter what they say? Most analysts think not. More likely it results because people are ill at ease with the problems that arise because of cultural differences (not limited to race) that arise among groups[9]. What parents seem to object to is plans that send their children off to unfamiliar neighborhoods and that give little thought to what kind of social glue will hold the resulting congregation of students and parents together.

Work-based attendance offers an appealing way of integrating schools while avoiding both of these problems. First, a system of school attendance built around the workplace would in many cases lead to naturally integrated schools. Workplaces are generally less racially and socially segregated than residential neighborhoods. The degree of difference depends on location and the type of business such as office, industrial, retail, and so on, but a moment's reflection on the mix of employees in a typical downtown office building will illustrate the point. Workplaces, while far from ideal, offer better examples of racial integration than any other aspect of American life (as used here, "integration" means primarily close physical proximity of different races; job

titles and occupational roles, of course, remain considerably segregated). Thus with work-based attendance, racially balanced schools would be possible without compulsory busing. As with busing, children might still travel large distances to school, but unlike busing, they would travel with their parents to familiar neighborhoods.

Second, work-based attendance would build a new configuration of students around the social structure of the workplace. It could rely on parents' knowing one another in ways that are virtually impossible under most busing plans. If not personally known to one another, parents of other children are at least accessible in the same workplace or one close by. Moreover, for some families, especially two-earner and single-parent families, the workplace offers a powerful social structure that is stronger than the neighborhood. Thus, it is probable that work-based attendance would produce schools that are more truly integrated rather than those that, while legally desegregated, exhibit few social links among racial, social, and ethnic groups.

3. Work-based attendance would offer the potential for strengthening the connections between school and work. The number of high school students holding part-time jobs has been increasing steadily. It has been estimated that in 1980, 30 percent of 9th and 10th graders and 50 percent of 11th and 12th graders worked for at least part of the school year[10]. Educators generally agree that work experience is valuable, particularly if the schools are involved in organizing the jobs so that they are meaningfully related to the curriculum. But the reality is that high school students are most likely to be employed in stores or restaurants, and many educators fear that this kind of work experience detracts from rather than enhances their education. There is no question that attention to developing productive relationships between the

school and work worlds is badly needed.

Work-based attendance would offer the potential for developing and strengthening the connections between school and work. A key element to the success of cooperative ventures is commitment on the part of both employers and schools. With the children of employees attending nearby schools, companies would have closer ties to the local school system, and therefore would likely be supportive of cooperative ventures with schools. There is a general concern in the business community about the quality of education, and there is a desire to do something about it. Work-based attendance would provide firms with a focus for participation if many of their employees had children in the same schools. And, with their children eligible to participate in work experience programs, employees would have a greater stake in making them successful.

Work experience programs could take several forms: school based enterprises (activities in which young people actually produce goods and services), public service, and private sector employment.[11] The full array of such opportunities is most suitable for secondary school students, but it is possible to imagine that elementary and junior high school students could engage in school enterprises and public service. These activities could increase students' exposure to the work world and thus increase opportunities for them to evaluate critically how work is organized and carried out, something that they have few opportunities to do now.[12] One of the unfortunate consequences of the separation of home and work is that many children have only a vague notion of their parents' jobs and never see them at work. Closer connections between school and work would benefit everyone.

4. Work-based attendance would respond to growing pressures for greater parental control over where children attend school. There is an underlying

dissatisfaction with public education that results, at least in part, from the inflexibility that has grown up around much of the existing system. Although work-based attendance would not be a panacea for these deeply rooted feelings of frustration, it would offer opportunities for more choice, new institutional arrangements, new relationships among parents and students, greater parental involvement, and closer connections between school and the business community.

The pressures for expanded choice are increasing. In the eyes of many critics, public education has grown excessively bureaucratic and unresponsive because it has enjoyed a virtual monopoly over elementary and secondary schools.[13] For those with strong convictions about the efficiency of markets and the wisdom of natural choices, the best remedy for this state of affairs is to break the state's stranglehold on elementary and secondary education by forcing it to compete on the open market with private schools that would be accessible to everyone through a system of vouchers or tuition tax credits.[14] For others, vouchers hold no special appeal except as a way of escaping from particular schools that are unsatisfactory. Many believe that expanding choice and providing parents and students with the means to fulfill their desires for different types of schools would bring an end to the oppressive education bureaucracy and do much to restore faith in the nation's public schools.

Since work-based attendance expands parental choice, the question arises: is not work-based attendance merely a limited variant of a voucher system and if so, why restrict choices to public schools near the workplace? Why not allow completely free choice? There are both philosophical and practical responses to these questions.

On a philosophical level, the debates over expanded choices must not lose sight of the important socializing functions demanded of elementary and

secondary education. Schools should not be mainly an extension of the home, reinforcing parents' values; rather, they should be representative of the collective society, charged with transmitting cultures, languages, and the skills to function effectively in a diverse democratic society. Doing this successfully requires that students be exposed to a diversity of views, cultures, and backgrounds.[15] Thus, schooling, at least in the early years, is inherently "public" and ought not to give way to narrow private wants.

On a practical level, there remain unresolved problems with vouchers that make full-scale implementation unlikely in the near future. First, without careful controls, vouchers are likely to promote racial and social segregation; the evidence from the results of other private decisions is overwhelming on this point. Second, unless vouchers were to lead to large reductions in cost per student, implementation would entail substantial additional public expense at a time when the public sector is severely strained and taxpayers are generally unwilling to vote for higher taxes.

Work-based attendance offers some expansion of parental choice and introduces an element of competition without the problems associated with vouchers. In short, the idea reflects the hope that making education more responsive to change and to parents' desires for more options does not depend on privatization and the abandonment of public purpose. Work-based attendance demonstrates that it is possible to identify and expand options that break down some of the unnecessary rigidit, that has grown up around the existing system and at the same time are consistent with the broader social aims of public education.

The extent to which these four benefits are realized by any one work-based attendance plan will depend on the number of parents who elect

work-based attendance, the demographic characteristics of the area, and the willingness of businesses to participate in cooperative ventures with schools. At one extreme a work-based attendance program might involve only a few families who find it suits their needs. While the benefits would be significant for those families in terms of increased convenience and expanded choice, the impact on the schools would be barely noticeable. At the other extreme, work-based attendance could involve thousands of pupils and numerous employers, have a substantial impact on integration, and spur the development of high quality child care and work experience programs. One of the appealing features of work-based attendance is the wide range of possibilities it offers. A plan could be tailored to suit the needs of almost any area. It could also start small and expand over time.

HOW WOULD IT WORK?

As an example of how work-based attendance might work for a family, imagine the following: parent and child leave home in the morning and travel together to work and school, spending together a half hour that used to be spent traveling in different directions. The parent drops the child off at school and proceeds to his or her office or factory or store a few blocks away. At lunch time the parent returns to the school for a conference with the child's teacher. Another day parent and child might have lunch together, or the parent might attend a school concert or play. Once a week the parent, with the employer's blessing, spends an hour at the school tutoring children having

difficulty with reading. After school is over, the child attends an after-school program at the school site. As part of this program, a group of children visit a parent's workplace. At five o'clock the parent returns to the school to pick up the child and they return home together.

It is apparent from this description that there is much to be done to develop feasible work-based attendance plans. For schools to be able to offer such an option there are many procedural, legal, and fiscal issues to be worked out. For work-based attendance to be attractive to parents, transportation and child care needs have to be addressed. And for employers to become involved, clearly defined expectations and roles must be developed.

Without pretending to have all the answers, we present here some of the major issues that would have to be dealt with in developing a work-based attendance plan. Since work-based attendance plans would vary considerably in scope from one location to another, alternative solutions are suggested rather than a model plan outlined.

Eligibility. Establishing criteria for eligibility is one of the first steps a district would have to take. The most important questions are: what requirements should parents have to meet to be eligible? What happens if more families want to participate than the district can accept? And, what happens if a parent changes jobs or becomes unemployed?

Liberal definitions of eligibility would be most consistent with the goal of expanding choice. Thus, for example, part time workers would be eligible as well as full time ones. It is very possible, however, that this approach would produce too many students for districts with good reputations to accommodate, making rationing necessary. Then participation might be limited to children of full time employees, a first-come, first-served policy instituted, or length of

parent employment in the district considered.

As an alternative, excess demand could be dealt with by providing more facilities instead of rationing. Some large employers, especially those involved in new construction or major renovation, might be encouraged to set aside space at the worksite for a public school. A school district might work out an arrangement with a local business that employees would have first choice of student places in the new school, with remaining openings being filled by children of residents nearby. Because of the need for special facilities such as gymnasiums, auditoriums, laboratories, and so on, such plans would be most easily incorporated into downtown redevelopment projects or newly constructed suburban industrial parks and office projects.

Are there sufficient numbers of schools near workplaces to make work-based attendance feasible without expensive new building? In some areas of the nation's oldest and most densely developed cities, there probably are not. There are hardly enough schools in Manhattan, for example, to absorb substantial numbers of children of nearby workers. However, in smaller cities, as well as in the less densely developed cities of the west, existing schools are not located far from work centers. Thus, in Berkeley, a city of about 100,000 people, seven of the city's ten elementary schools, its two junior high schools, and its senior high school are all within a mile of the university campus and the city's central business district. Moreover, the district recently closed three other elementary schools because of insufficient enrollments.

In addition to eligibility and procedures for rationing excess demand, policies would also have to be established concerning eligibility when a parent changes jobs or becomes unemployed. From an educational point of view, it would be desirable to allow the child to stay in the school at least for the rest

of the school year and possibly longer, especially if the child had only a year or two remaining at the school. This might not be practical, however, for a parent whose new job is twenty miles in the opposite direction. Probably the easiest solution would allow a parent to remove a child at any time because of a job change, but also guarantee that a child could always complete the current school year.

The issue raises the more general problem of enrollment stability. The stability of the labor force would be a factor to consider in deciding whether or not to implement a work-based attendance plan in a particular area. High turnover in the work force might lead to high turnover in the school population, which would not be desirable for either schools or families. However, residential turnover can be very high too, and in some places may even be higher than workforce turnover. This problem may be best left to families who can be the best judges of which is more stable for them, job or residence, and who can decide about participating in a work-based attendance program accordingly.

Legal Issues. Any change in school district attendance policy raises legal issues. Among the most important are the statutory authority for work-based attendance, compliance with desegregation laws, and the effect of guarantees of equal opportunity. These would have to be dealt with on a case by case basis.

For example, sufficient statutory authority for work-based attendance may exist in some states and not others, and in some implementing work-based attendance would require new legislation. While work-based attendance would not inherently conflict with desegregation laws -- in fact, in some areas work-based attendance would promote desegregation -- work-based attendance might disrupt a particular desegregation plan. Consequently, work-based

attendance may not be possible in some areas or would need to be constrained by only allowing transfers that do not adversely affect racial balances.

Equal opportunity is another important issue since work-based attendance provides more choice of schools to some families than others. Under work-based attendance, two earner families might have as many as three schools to choose from, while the unemployed and those living near work would have only one. No easy solutions to the problem of unequal choice are apparent, but it is important to note the issue of unequal opportunity already exists with residence-based attendance. For example, in some places transfers are permitted for some but not for others, depending on how the racial balances of the sending and receiving schools would be affected. Moreover, the interaction of housing opportunities with school attendance areas also greatly constrains school options for low-income families. For the working poor, then, work-based attendance would expand educational alternatives since they are able to work in many communities in which the cannot afford to live.

For the unemployed, however, choices would remain limited, and as unemployment is more heavily concentrated among minorities, the impact of work-based attendance on different racial and ethnic groups will need to be carefully assessed. It is important, however, to keep this unemployment issue in perspective. Although unemployment rates are at historic highs and have reached shocking levels among some subgroups of minority populations (e.g., black teenagers), it must be remembered that unemployment rates among parents with school age children are much lower than the national averages and that this pattern holds across racial and ethnic groups. Thus, the impact of unemployment on the equity of work-based attendance is not likely to be as severe as one might first imagine.

Fiscal Issues. Implementing work-based attendance will also require solving a number of fiscal problems created by students crossing existing district lines. It is worth noting that interdistrict transfers already occur in a number of states, and the procedures for handling transfers of funds are procedurally straightforward. Most state and federal categorical funds (special education, Title I, vocational education, and bilingual education funds, for example) simply follow the student. For general purpose support, the receiving district establishes a rate of tuition charged to the sending district.

A problem arises when tuition in the receiving district exceeds general purpose expenditures per student in the sending district. While various school finance reform efforts have greatly reduced general purpose spending disparities among districts, disparities remain. The simplest solution to this problem would have the state make up the difference by establishing a special fund for implementing work-based attendance. In a state such as California, where over 90 percent of the ADA attends school in districts spending within $200 per ADA of one another, such a solution would not be expensive. Thus, even if 20 percent of the state's 4 million school children opted for schools in districts spending $100 per ADA more than their district of residence, the cost to the state would be about $80 million, or less than 1 percent of the $13 billion the state presently spends on K-12 education.

Child care. For most families, school and work schedules do not coincide exactly. Therefore, work-based attendance would only be workable if adequate after-school (and possibly before-school) child care were available either at the school, the workplace, or some other convenient location that did not require the parent to transport the child between the school and the program. For such programs to be feasible, they must attract enough students, and they must be

paid for.

Many working parents already have their children in after-school programs at or near their current schools. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that well organized, high quality after-school programs would attract enough families to be successful. These parents already paying for after school care could presumably continue to do so. Under work-based attendance, only the location would be different.

Of greater concern are the relatively large numbers of elementary school children who now look after themselves after school, in many cases because their parents cannot afford supervised care. Parents willing to leave their children alone in and around their homes would not necessarily want them wandering around the workplace neighborhood after school. For those unable to afford supervised care, some form of subsidy would be necessary. Employers are one potential source. More and more companies are subsidizing child care as an employee benefit, and some large companies even provide facilities for child care. Some school districts already offer after-school programs. Others might not want to run programs but might be willing to provide the space and some equipment (with or without charge) to private providers.

Transportation. In its simplest form, work-based attendance would require that parents transport their own children. This seems reasonable, since parents would be traveling in the same directions as their children and could drive them or accompany them on public transportation. There would, of course, be the additional bus or train fare, which could be too much for some families to absorb. In such cases, it might be feasible for the district to subsidize families whose children would otherwise ride the school bus. Alternatively, the state could establish a special transportation fund. Under some circumstances it might

even be feasible for parents and children to ride the school bus together, although this would only be practical if enough families came from the same direction.[16]

Parent-supervised transportation would work, however, only as long as it were convenient for parents to travel at the same time as their children. This condition would not be hard to meet if before and after-school care were available at either the school or work site. Still, transportation would on occasion be difficult for families when the parent was away on business or not at work because of illness. In the end, individual families would have to weigh these inconveniences in deciding whether or not to opt for work-based attendance.

Employer Involvement. If the full benefits of work-based attendance are to be realized, employer involvement in the schools is critical. In the absence of such involvement, work-based attendance could simply amount to a limited voucher system; with it, better integration of school and work could be achieved. At the elementary school level, the main form of involvement would probably be child care, either providing actual facilities or subsidizing child care as part of a fringe benefit package. Other forms of support, such as release time for parents to participate in the classroom or attend school events, for example, would also be useful, benefiting both parents and children. Or some companies, especially manufacturers, might be willing to donate materials or equipment to the school. While some already make such contributions, they would probably be even more willing to donate to a school attended by the children of a large number of employees.

At the secondary level, employer participation could take the form of direct involvement in curriculum, we well as support services. Possibilities

include: lending staff for career and vocational education programs; sponsoring worksite education programs that combine classroom instruction with on-the-job training; providing work experience opportunities for students; assisting with the retraining and upgrading of teachers involved in occupational training, mathematics, and science; and supporting school based enterprises -- activities in which students engage in the production of goods and services (such as student-run cafeterias, energy audits, manufacture and installation of solar equipment in public buildings, etc.).

These are not new activities. Some employers already engage in them, but it is likely that work-based attendance would increase incentives to participate in such activities, and make it easier for an employer to concentrate energies on a single school. There are, however, potential disadvantages. Schools are not intended to serve the short-run interests of employers at the expense of long-run interests of students. Moreover, many citizens have legitimate concerns about the power of business to influence the school curriculum. Work-based attendance plans need to consider these issues carefully.

WOULD IT BE FEASIBLE?

Work-based attendance would be feasible only if a significant number of families opted for it, if employers were willing to participate and if school districts agreed to allow it. Are these necessary conditions likely to be met?

There are undoubtedly a number of parents who would give serious consideration to a work-based attendance option: parents unhappy with their childrens' current schools but without the resources or inclination to seek private schooling; busy parents who wish to spend more time with their children

and who would welcome the chance to spend the commute time together; parents who would like to be physically closer to their children during the day to facilitate attendance at school functions or participation in the classroom; and parents who would like their children to participate in a work experience program. While these families would be open to the idea of work-based attendance, whether or not they actually would choose it would depend to a large extent on the perceived overall quality of the schools near work relative to those in their residential neighborhoods. Moreover, at least at the elementary level, the availability, quality, and cost of after-school child care would also figure prominently. If the schools were good, and the after-school programs were as good or better than those typically offered in residential neighborhoods. A large number of working parents might opt for work-based attendance.

Some families, on the other hand, would probably decide against work-based attendance no matter what. It is commonly believed that schools are a major factor in the choice of residence, and that many parents tolerate long commutes to work so their children can enjoy the advantages of a suburban neighborhood. This may mean not only schools, but also high quality after-school recreation programs and lessons, and a relatively safe environment for unorganized activities. Work-based attendance would offer these families few incentives to give up their neighborhood schools. They would not have to do so.

The important question is whether or not enough families would opt for work-based attendance to make the initial development effort worthwhile. There are several reasons to think the numbers would be significant. First, the simple fact is that even now fewer and fewer children are going to neighborhood schools. Schools within walking distance have become the exception rather than the rule since the late 1960's. As long as a decade ago, over half of all public

school students rode buses to school, and fewer than half of all elementary school children went to school within a mile of their homes.[17] With expanded desegregation efforts and public school closures because of declining enrollments, the average distance traveled to school is probably even greater now. Thus, the number of families with strong attachments to a neighborhood school is probably smaller than is commonly perceived.

Second, many parents, especially in poor neighborhoods, are not satisfied with their neighborhood schools. In many metropolitan areas, significant numbers of city and suburban residents commute to industrial or office jobs in suburbs they could not afford to live in. Parents in this category might be delighted to take their children to school near where they work.

Third, employers are likely to find work-based attendance attractive. There is a general concern in the business community about the quality of education, and a desire to do something about it. Work-based attendance would provide firms with a focus for participation if many of their employees had children in the same schools. Also, employer-sponsored or subsidized child care has proved to be a popular benefit, and one that has contributed to the stability and morale of the company workforce. Work-based attendance would make it easier to organize child care programs as an employee benefit.

Fourth, many existing school administrations will find the notion appealing, despite the numerous procedural, legal, and fiscal issues that will need to be addressed. For some, the possibility of increased racial and social integration without the trauma of compulsory busing would be welcomed. The increased participation of parents and greater involvement by the business community would also be welcomed by many, particularly those with extensive vocational programs. Finally, for some school districts with declining

enrollments, it might even provide an opportunity to fill up underutilized facilities.

With proper attention paid to special local circumstances, a feasible work-based attendance plan could be designed for almost any metropolitan area. For example, to attract the participation of suburban commuters, central city schools would probably have to offer specialized programs that took advantage of unique urban cultural advantages or scale economies -- a highly specialized program in the arts perhaps, or an elementary school using the most advanced microcomputers and software. Realistically, it is unlikely that suburban parents would transfer their children to the average inner city school. In a university town with excellent schools, on the other hand, the planning emphasis may have to be not on attracting students, but on developing equitable rationing procedures to meet an anticipated high demand for work-based attendance. Within suburban areas many families may desire work-based attendance, but wide disparities in spending for education among neighboring districts may make it difficult for districts to agree on a plan. The major planning effort then would concentrate on removing this barrier.

Is there a role for the federal government? In experimenting with work-based attendance, there are at least four functions the federal government could perform. First, it could underwrite the costs for planning and developing one or more demonstration projects. The various technical, legal, and fiscal problems that must be solved are difficult enough that no district is likely to undertake work-based attendance on its own. Second, the federal government could underwrite the costs of eliminating spending disparities between sending and receiving districts. For demonstration projects, these costs would be modest -- on the average about $100 to $200 per participating student. Third, the

federal government could underwrite childcare and transportation subsidies, which again on a demonstration basis should be low cost. Finally, it could underwrite further research, evaluation, and dissemination of the experiment's results.

Would work-based attendance have positive effects on American education? Without actual experimentation, it is difficult to say at this stage. Certainly many parents will not find the option attractive, and like any major organizational change, it will generate its share of resisters and doubters. For many parents, however, and perhaps especially for those whose educational options are now the most constrained, work-based attendance may offer some important choices that increase their satisfaction with the public schools.

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